

## **Formal and Informal Public Comment During the Program EIR/EIS\* Process**

The California High Speed Rail Authority (“HSRA”) is beginning the process of preparing a Program Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”) and Program Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”) to evaluate a proposed high speed rail system. During this process there will be many opportunities for providing public comments to the Authority.

There are **distinctions between informal and formal opportunities for public comment**. Comments submitted during informal comment periods, such as during town hall meetings, do not take the place of comments submitted during a formal comment period. Formal comments are those submitted on a draft EIR/EIS during a specified public comment period. Comments submitted during the formal comment period on the draft Program EIR/EIS will receive a formal response and may be important to preserving a commenter’s rights to object to the final Program EIR/EIS.

The **town hall meetings** scheduled by the Authority will provide opportunities for early **informal comment**. These meetings will begin before a Notice of Preparation of an EIR/Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS is issued formally to begin the EIR/EIS process and before a draft document is available for review. Comments provided at these meetings will provide information to the Authority to help it develop the environmental studies and documents which will be part of the draft EIR/EIS.

There will also be meetings to provide the public, organizations and agencies opportunities to comment on what items ought to be covered in the draft Program EIR/EIS. These meetings are known as “**scoping meetings**,” because they relate to the scope of the EIR/EIS. The Authority will also be consulting with public agencies.

**The draft Program EIR/EIS** will be prepared and is expected to be available for public review in late 2002 and for **formal public comment in late 2002/early 2003**. The draft EIR/EIS may not reflect all of the specific, informal comments received before the draft was developed. Those who conclude that their informal comments or concerns are not adequately addressed in the draft document would need to submit additional comments during the formal comment period in order to protect their rights to object to the final EIR/EIS. The HSRA will conduct public hearings to discuss the draft Program EIR/EIS and to receive additional formal public comment on it. These formal comments may result in changes to the draft document. A summary of, and responses to, the comments that are received during this formal comment period will be prepared and will be part of the proposed final Program EIR/EIS.

**Check with the HSRA in the future at its website ([www.highspeedrail.ca.gov](http://www.highspeedrail.ca.gov)) or by calling (916-324-1541) for updated information on public comment opportunities.**

\*A Program EIR/EIS will be prepared to comply with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (often called “CEQA,” Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq.) and the National Environmental Policy Act (often called “NEPA,” Title 42 United States Code Section 4321 et seq.). Reference is made to an EIR/EIS in view of the HSRA’s request to the Federal Railroad Administration to serve as lead agency in this process for purposes of NEPA.

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